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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000315

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/19/2018

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL OSCE TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: PM EROGAN ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR EXPANDED KURDISH LANGUAGE BROADCASTING

REF: A. ANKARA 182

1B. ANKARA 285

1C. ANKARA 266

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b),(d)
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11. (C) Summary and comment. PM Erdogan and officials from the state-controlled "TRT" broadcasting network announced plans February 17 for TRT to dedicate a channel to broadcast an array of Kurdish language programs. The PM set no rollout date, but his statement provides the most specifics to date on plans to increase Kurdish language broadcasting. If the GOT follows through, it will be groundbreaking -- an opportunity to broadcast its own message, rather than having others outside of Turkey control the Kurdish language message Turkey's own citizens are hearing. End summary and comment.

GOT to Increase Kurdish-language Broadcasting

12. (SBU) Answering questions from several journalists during a February 17 "A TV" interview, PM Erdogan said the state-controlled "TRT" network would soon dedicate one channel to Kurdish language broadcasting. He mentioned the possibility of Farsi and Arabic broadcasting as well. Referring to Kurds as one of the basic elements of Turkish society, the PM said it was out of the question to assimilate them. Asked whether a "Kurdology" institute should be established, Erdogan responded that there are 36 ethnic groups in Turkey; institutes should be established for all. "Each should be able to establish courses wherever they want to teach their mother tongue." The PM added he had recently seen a satellite TV station that urged its viewers to be human shields, an approach he found unacceptable.

13. (SBU) TRT officials told "Sabah" newspaper the satellite broadcasts in Kurdish and several additional languages would reach beyond Turkey's borders to northern Iraq. The programming would include news, music, entertainment, sports, arts, and documentaries, according to TRT. Neither Erdogan nor TRT gave a launch date for the channel.

14. (C) AKP's Ihsan Arslan, a Kurdish MP from Diyarbakir, told us increased Kurdish-language broadcasting is part of a comprehensive strategy to improve the situation in Turkey's southeast. The broadcasting would complement economic stimulus provided by the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) and

policies to attract investment to the region, as well as increased educational opportunities. Arslan believes TRT's past Kurdish language broadcasts failed to draw viewers due to dull content. This time, TRT plans to draw viewers away from the PKK-affiliated Denmark-based Roj-TV by delivering improved content viewers will want to watch.

¶15. (C) Opposition Democratic Left Party (DSP) MP Jale Agirbas voiced support for the proposal, adding such measures should have been implemented sooner. Kurds are already watching Kurdish programming on TV and via the internet, she noted; rather than watch Roj-TV type propaganda, Kurds should be viewing TRT broadcasts with Kurdish content.

Pro-Kurdish DTP Skeptical

¶16. (C) Pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) members, many of whom have been prosecuted for trying to use Kurdish to provide municipal services, were skeptical. Sanliurfa MP Ibrahim Binici dismissed Erdogan's announcement: "If he wanted to solve the problem, he first would work to end the 130 ongoing prosecutions of Kurdish politicians for using Kurdish language." Diyarbakir Sur mayor Abdullah Demirbas, who was fired and prosecuted for using Kurdish in municipal services, had earlier told us that anything Erdogan had to say on the subject was window-dressing to please the EU. Demirbas said the PM should show his sincerity by ending the prosecution of those who attempt to give information about basic public service in the language understood by the public.

Activists, Academics Urge GOT to Focus on Kurdish Problem

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¶17. (SBU) Several non-DTP Kurdish activists welcomed government plans to increase Kurdish language broadcasting, and called on AKP to go further. Human Rights Foundation President Yavuz Onen recommended AKP insert language in its draft constitution proposal to protect the right to use non-Turkish languages in all areas of life, including politics. Ankara University professor Baskin Oran argued the draft constitution should recognize a territorial-based Turkish "supra-identity" and cultural "sub-identities," such as Kurd, Armenian, and Greek. HakPar President Sertac Bucak, on trial for advocating the introduction of German-style federalism in Turkey, told us AKP can solve Turkey's seemingly intractable problems only by ending prosecutions for non-violent speech.

¶18. (SBU) Meanwhile, 100 academics sent a letter to President Gul requesting he play an active role in solving the Kurdish problem. Murat Belge, Orhan Pamuk, Baskin Oran, and other prominent scholars urged Gul to pursue a peaceful solution and argued that DTP should not be closed during "this delicate period." The letter demonstrates that the current push for resolution of the Kurdish issue enjoys broad support among academics.

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